



Collaborating with AFRINIC: Stories from our Community

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AFRINIC
Webinar
Series

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SPEAKERS

Dr. Viv Padayatchy - Director and Founder, Cybernaptics Ltd

Fionga Asonga - CEO, Technology Service Providers of Kenya (TESPOK)

Dr. Amreesh Phokeer - Internet Measurement and Data Expert, Internet Society (ISOC)

Seun Ojedeji - Deputy Director ICT, Federal University Oye Okiti

Alan Barrett - Board member, ICANN

Aisha Hamid - Senior Corporate Planning Manager, Gambia Airlines

Moderator: **Sarah Kiden**, ICT Researcher, Northumbria University, Newcastle

Sarah Kiden: Hi, everyone. Good morning. Good afternoon and good evening. It's my pleasure to welcome you to this webinar today. The title of the webinar is 'Collaborating with AFRINIC Stories from our Community'. Before I go into further details, I guess many of you know, many of you who have joined this call, that it's 19 years of AFRINIC, so basically this webinar today should be a celebration.

We hope to hear good stories. We hope to hear people reminiscing about the past and looking to the future. So yeah, please join me in celebration of 19 years of AFRINIC. So if you've been joining previous webinars, you know that it's been an opportunity for the community to engage with AFRINIC on dialogue and different issues that are affecting the African continent related to the Internet.

So my name is Sarah Kiden. I will be your moderator for the call. I am a researcher and I've been part of the AFRINIC community for, I don't know, maybe 10 years now. On our panel today, we have people who have been part of the AFRINIC community and staff, so different capacities.

We have Dr. Viv Badayachi, who is the Director and Founder of Cybernaptics Limited. We have Mrs Fiona Asonga, who is the Chief Executive Officer for Technology Services Providers of Kenya, that's TESPOK. We have Dr. Amreesh Phokeer, who is the Internet Measurement and Data Expert at Internet Society. We have Mr. Seun Ojedeji, who is the Deputy Director of ICT at the Federal University Oye Okiti. We have Mr. Alan Barrett, who is a board member at ICANN, so Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers. And finally, last but not least, Ms. Aisha Hamid, who is Senior Corporate Planning Manager at the Gambia Airlines.

So, instead of me reading their bios, I think we will invite them to introduce themselves. And I will start with Amreesh.

Dr. Amreesh Phokeer: Thank you, Sarah. Hi, everyone. So, let me, first of all, introduce myself, thank AFRINIC for inviting me and organizing this very interesting panel. I must say that I feel very privileged to be amongst highly esteemed guests here, former chairmen, former CEOs, and other colleagues I've worked with over the past years.

So my name is Amreesh Phokeer, I am based in Mauritius, and I currently work for the Internet Society as an Internet measurement and data expert. This is very equivalent to a data scientist or researcher position. My day to day is I do research on the Internet to understand the global health of the Internet and understand trends such as analysing Internet shutdowns, censorship, and similar things.

I was a former staff of AFRINIC for about 10 years starting in 2011, and we will have the time to talk about my experience as a staff at AFRINIC and all the good time that I had over there.

Thank you.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Amreesh.

Alan?

Alan Barrett: Thank you.

My name's Alan Barrett. I've been involved in AFRINIC since before AFRINIC even existed. In 1997 I was one of the authors of the proposal to create AFRINIC. Since then I've attended several meetings trying to get AFRINIC going. I served on the first board of AFRINIC, which I think started 20 years ago. 2004 in Dakar was the meeting where AFRINIC's first bylaws were approved and the first board was elected by the community.

So, I was on the board for a few years. I served as AFRINIC CEO from 2015 to 2019, and I'm now a member of the ICANN Board of Directors.

Thanks.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Alan.

We'll go to Ms. Aisha Hamid.

Aisha Hamid: Sarah, good morning, and good morning, everyone. I am Aisha, Aisha Hamid Saho, and I am from The Gambia. I am an AFRINIC fellow of course, but I'm coming from the aviation sector, so I think I'll put you guys in the air for the time being. Well, like I said, my interaction with AFRINIC started in 2018 in Dakar, but prior to that, of course, I've been in the ecosystem as well. I've served as the Secretary General for ISOC Gambia for three years, and actually, it was in 2018 that I met with Mr. Alan in Dakar, was quite an experience. So, I'm really glad to be among the panelists, but currently I'm working with the aviation industry, Gambia International Airlines, where I oversee the corporate planning department as the senior corporate planning manager.

So, I am happy to be here to share my experience and of course, learn more from the great minds that we have here with us today.

Thank you.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Aisha.

We have Dr. Viv Padayatchy next.

Dr. Viv Padayatchy: Hi, everyone. First of all, thank you to AFRINIC for this kind invitation. I feel privileged to have the chance to be able to address you guys.

So, professionally, I am the Managing Director of Cybernaptics and associated companies, we are an IT service provider. But, I've been involved with AFRINIC for a very long time, in fact before the election of the first board of AFRINIC in Dakar, which was the AFRINIC first meeting, because before that, I was involved in the incorporation of the organisation in Mauritius.

At that time, I was working closely with the original CEO Abdel to have it incorporated. I also lobbied the government to have incubation support because AFRINIC at that time was just a burgeoning organisation with only two employees. So, that's how I started getting involved. At the time I was chairman of the ISP Association in Mauritius.

And then, of course, there was this memorable event in the history of AFRINIC, which was its first ever public meeting, which saw the handing over of the transitional board, that was chaired at that time by Dr. Nii, to a fully elected board, and that's the year also when I was elected to the board, and I formally came on board of AFRINIC.

Since then I've served on the board, I've also been the chairman. I served two consecutive mandates as chair of the board, and now, I'm still connected to AFRINIC through the Council of Elders as a past chair. So, I've been on and continuously, I would say, involved in some way, less now than before, obviously, but I've been connected to AFRINIC since its inception, so looking very much forward to our session today.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Viv.

And finally, Seun Ojedeji.

Seun Ojedeji: Yeah, hi. Hello, everyone. Good to see the faces here. Good to see some of the founding members of AFRINIC. It's a pleasure to be here as well, and thank you very much for the invitation. My name is Seun Ojedeji, as has been said by the moderator. My involvement with AFRINIC started around 2009 / 2010, or thereabouts.

A few years later, I was selected to be one of the co-chairs of the Policy Development Working Group of AFRINIC, where I served, I would call it two terms, because I actually replaced Alan at some point initially, and served a full term, then served a one year term, before I then moved on to the board, where I actually served for two terms. on the AFRINIC board. I was also privileged to serve as the Vice Chair of the board at some point in time. That is that for AFRINIC.

Outside of AFRINIC, by my profession, I'm actually a network engineer, and, of course, currently, as has been said, I'm a Deputy Director at a university in Nigeria called Federal University, where I have actually been serving since 2011, as one of the founding member staff there.

I think I'll stop here. I have other engagements with other institutions, but I think for the sake of time, I will stop at this point. Thank you. That's it.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Seun. So, we have one more panelist, Fiona Asonga, who is not yet on the call, but she will join us as we go along.

So, now that you've introduced yourselves, I think let's start with Amreesh, if that's okay. You had already started talking about your experience, so maybe we could build up on that a little bit. Maybe you could share personal experience and some highlights that AFRINIC has had on your career and professional development.

Dr. Amreesh Phokeer: Thank you, Sarah. Yeah, that's a quite loaded question. As I mentioned, I joined AFRINIC in 2011 as a software engineer. I was freshly graduating and knew nothing about networking and the world of the Internet, and, almost haphazardly, I found an ad on a newspaper in Mauritius saying that they are looking for a software engineer, and it is an African organisation looking for that, and somehow I was always attracted by the fact that I would like to contribute back to the African continent, after spending a few years in Europe and in the US, and I saw, oh, this is absolutely a great opportunity for me perhaps to contribute to the continent, and I wasn't aware where I was stepping at all.

I still remember on the day of my interview, I was so stressed because I knew nothing about networking, and the one question I had is what is an AS number? I couldn't answer that. I couldn't answer what is an AS number, but still the person who interviewed me thought that I could be a good contributor to the company and to the community.

And, fast forward 10 years, here I am. I must say that AFRINIC has been a pillar in my career, and what I am today is thanks to AFRINIC. I've grown tremendously in this company, starting as a software engineer, then gradually climbing the ladder to become the software engineering manager.

Afterwards, I decided that I would like to do a bit more research, because our continent has many challenges. As a new community on the Internet, we have to embrace this technology, but we have to also understand our challenges, and AFRINIC was in the right place to understand what are the challenges with regards to the Internet on the continent.

Thanks to the support of former CEOs, and also to Alan, who provided a lot of freedom and a lot of support to me, we created the research department and this got me into liking and embracing research as a core activity, and I decided to embark on a PhD later on, again, with the support of AFRINIC because they provide me the resources to do this research. Everything spun very well together. The work I was doing for my research was very much in line with the work I was doing for AFRINIC, and, like this, we nourish each other.

Again, for, for the 10 years I've spent at AFRINIC, I've never felt bored, always felt challenged doing better, and also thanks to all the mentorship I've received, and to the very friendly atmosphere that was in the company, it helped me a lot to grow and to become a better engineer and researcher in my career.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Amreesh, and for telling us that you didn't know what an AS number was -- don't worry, many of us didn't before we joined -- so yeah, thank you for sharing your story.

My next question is to Seun Ojedeji. You've been part of the AFRINIC community, you were a PDP co-chair, also you were a board member at some point, and you've done a few things in the community as a leader and also as a community member, so maybe if you could just reflect on some achievements or things that you've been involved in that you feel have had a positive impact on the community.

Seun Ojedeji: Thank you.

Well, AFRINIC is a kind of community center. When I was co-chair of PDWG, we only provide guidance, the community does a lot of the contribution. We trust much as possible to provide guidance to the working group. It's not easy, because we have a community of various opinions. At times, it can be very interesting. People always look forward to the Policy Development Working Group, because people come with their various views. Once it is time for the Policy Development Working Group, you will see the queue, because what we used to have was mics somewhere in the room, so people will have to queue behind the mic, and then you'll see a long queue. At times you'll see queue as much as getting towards the door side. Well, it is fun.

So, one of the things that during my time as co-chair was being able to eventually do what we call the consolidated policy manual. So, in the past before I was chair, we had AFRINIC policies in different individual formats. One had to be refined to each of the policies separately, so, during my time, and with Earnest, who happened to be staff providing us support at that time, and, of course, with my other co-chair Emile, we kind of came up with what we call the CPM, Consolidated Policy Manual, which allowed us to have all the policies together.

One interesting thing during my tenure as PDWG chair was that when, and I think it's very important to say it, I started in my involvement in AFRINIC around 2009, 2010, and I didn't know I was getting noticed. I was just participating normally, I was just doing my own thing. , I've gone through some of the things I've posted 13 years ago, and I was like, what? Why did I post this? But that was the level of knowledge I had then. Okay, so that was the level of the understanding I had then. And, people were friendly, people were not actually saying, why did you say this? This was not appropriate and things like that, oh, this is wrong. Just like Amreesh is saying now, that he doesn't know ASN at that time.

So, I was surprised when I got nominated to be co-chair, because I wasn't expecting it, and, of course, it was a challenge for me. Just three years into the community, and I was given that task. It was an opportunity. It also kind of created an encouragement to some people, because I consider myself a youth, to also participate in leadership roles. Even during my board membership role in AFRINIC, I think I was one of the youngest on the

board at that time, and it provided some opportunity or encouragement to people to also take leadership roles in those venues.

So, yes those are some of the things that I could remember, but like I said, I'm the one that talk much when it comes to policy, I stay on the queue before I became co-chair. I go on the mic and said various things. But, when I became a member of the board, it was a different thing entirely, so the things I wish I could say, I couldn't say them, because now I'm a board member and things like that, and I became the one that is receiving the heat. So, I was the one shooting the guns before, now I'm the one receiving the heat back.

But, again, all these were very, very ordered. The goal then was that, let us share our opinions in a respectful manner. Of course, there were times that I was the only one that had to chair the Policy Development Working Group, even without my co-chair, I think Emile was unavoidably absent at some point point in time, for two events like that. But, the community still worked together, we still communicated, we still exchanged views without issues, without abusing one another, and so on and so forth. I believe that those are some of the things that we need to ensure continues within this community, because there is no AFRINIC without the community. The community is the one that builds the organisation. So, it is my hope that those good old memories will be restored, and AFRINIC will continue to remain a whole huge multistakeholder community in Africa.

Thank you.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Seun, for sharing your story about being on both ends, as a community member asking the questions, and on the board having to respond to the questions that are being posed, so thank you for sharing that.

The next one is Viv. Your story is basically that you can continue to be involved even after you've left the board, or after you've left any role that you're holding within the community, so how has your role as being in the Council of Elders allowed you to continue contributing to AFRINIC's mission, and what unique insights do you think that role provides for you?

Dr. Viv Padayatchy: Thank you, Sarah. I think if I was to resume my role as a member of the Council of Elders, in one line, I think I'm part of what I would call the institutional memory of the organisation of AFRINIC, because going back to when I first joined the board, and that AFRINIC first meeting in Dakar that was in 2004, it's already 20 years, so that's how much time has passed. It was felt that it was necessary to have the past chairs available to advise the board on important matters, or where the board felt that they needed to be advised.

So, by definition, and as it is actually laid out in the bylaws, the Council of Elders serve at the pleasure of the AFRINIC board of directors, and we are consulted on matters... in

general, they are important matters, like, for example, when we are reviewing the bylaws. When the board were reviewing some aspects of their operations, or the organisation governance, then they reach out to us.

There has been, I think, some fear in the past, whereby some people might have viewed the Council of Elders as an attempt of past chairs to retain some involvement, or interfere with the board operations, but it has to be emphasized that we do so at the pleasure of the board. The Council of Elders have no statutory powers in the operation of the organisation, and we are here purely for advice.

I've enjoyed that role very much, because it has allowed me to share my experience, to, give my opinion on important matters related to the to the affairs of AFRINIC, and, because all of us are past chairs, most of us have reached a certain age, where no one has any ambition of serving again on the board, we've all served our mandates, so the board members do not view us as people who could potentially be competing with them at the next election, that give us a certain amount of neutrality.

But, an interesting development in the past few years, has been the Council of Elders stepping up as one of the governance body of AFRINIC as a result of the court cases and the legal difficulties that AFRINIC has found itself in, and where we had to come forward and try, in our own way, to see how we can help AFRINIC. But, that is really an exception, and that is because of the injunction that is currently in effect against the AFRINIC board.

There's been many happy memories of interaction as a Council of Elder member with the Board of AFRINIC, meeting the different chairs, working with the different chairs, working with the different CEOs. I've known Alan, for example, as a board member, but also as a CEO of AFRINIC. I've interacted with the staff, and, as I said, the board members who have come and gone, and they were all very interesting individuals with interesting backgrounds, and it's been really a privilege for me to have been involved with that crowd.

The other thing maybe I would like to say is how AFRINIC has changed, because I've actually seen the organisation from a fledgling RIR in 2004 with just two employees. We had Abdel, who was the CEO, and Ernest, who was the IP analyst, I think his title was at that time, and I've seen the organisation grow in terms of staffing, in terms of putting in place the necessary processes and control, growing in maturity, but also growing in its stature internationally and in Africa.

When Seun, earlier, was mentioning that people were queueing at the mic to participate in the public meeting, it was not always the case. I remember, back in 2004, and 2005 and the subsequent meetings, we almost had to beg people to come to the mic and to participate, because, especially in the African continent, our members were very shy. Perhaps language was also a problem, very early on we had both French and English that could be spoken at our meetings, but it just happened that our crowd was not the

type of crowd who actively participated in things like policy development governance, all these kind of matters.

That has changed, and I can see that we have now a much more vocal, perhaps not as vocal as in other regions, but quite vocal, membership. They do participate, although in maybe last year or so, this has died down a bit. I think the kind of initiative that you guys have come up with, hopefully can rekindle that kind of engagement with the community.

So, I think that's basically what I wanted to say regarding my involvement as part of the Council of Elders, Sarah, and thank you. I'll hand over back to you.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you so much, Viv, for sharing your story. I've actually learned a few things from what you've said. Particularly, I think, sometimes, this is my opinion, not speaking on behalf of anyone, when you don't hear these stories, you have just some conceptions about it, but it's nice to hear it from the perspective of people who have been there, so thank you for sharing that.

Next we will go to Alan. So, Alan, when you were introducing yourself, you mentioned how you've been part of AFRINIC before it became AFRINIC, and then you went all the way to, serving in different capacities and then becoming a CEO of AFRINIC. So, I don't know if you can just reflect on your leadership tenure within AFRINIC, your legacy, and what you aimed to leave as you left the organisation basically.

Alan Barrett: Thank you, Sarah.

I was inspired to work on creating AFRINIC by some friends in the industry in, I think, it was 1997. At that time, the other RIRs had not really started yet. The RIPE NCC and APNIC were around, but ARIN and LACNIC and AFRINIC had not yet started. I was inspired by Randy Bush to work with a few other people on creating a proposal to start AFRINIC, and so the initial author of that proposal was myself and Nii Quaynor, Sana Bellamine from Tunisia at the time, and Nashwa Abdel-Baki from Egypt. worked on a proposal, taking inspiration from the other RIRs. I presented that at a meeting in a meeting organized by ISOC in 97 in Kuala Lumpur. At the time, it didn't receive much support, but over the next year, behind the scenes, several people, I think Nii Quaynor was a big part of that, Pierre Dandjinou, Pierre Ouedraogo worked on building community support.

I think my best memory of AFRINIC was from a meeting in Cotonou in 98, where the community basically came together for what seemed to me like the first time, and really supported the idea of creating AFRINIC. A little subcommittee at that meeting worked into the night to make many changes to the draft bylaws. So that Cotonou meeting in 98 was where the idea of AFRINIC having six regions, came to fruition, so the idea that the board members of AFRINIC should come from the North, the South, the East, the West, Central Africa, and the Indian Ocean Islands, those six regions. It was a very good

experience for me to find at that meeting that we were able to build consensus, and everyone at that meeting essentially supported the idea of creating AFRINIC. Also at that time ICANN was just being created and the same meeting supported the idea that ICANN should be created.

Then, a couple of years later, there was a meeting in Accra, Ghana, in 2001, where an interim board or steering committee was appointed. I can't remember what terminology we used, I think they called it an interim board, and yeah, I was a member of that.

That board worked on appointing the first employees. That's the board that hired Abdel and Ernest as the first two employees, put out a call for proposals for hosting AFRINIC, and proposals were received from several governments and similar organisations around Africa, and yeah, the decision was made to incorporate AFRINIC in Mauritius, to have an operations center in South Africa, and both of those were done with support of the governments involved.

There was also supposed to be a training center in Ghana, and a disaster recovery facility in Egypt, but unfortunately those never really worked out. There was a decision that they should be done, but it never really happened.

Then, Viv was very much involved with the Mauritian government, organizing for the incorporation of AFRINIC, and finally, in 2004 at the first AFRINIC meeting in Dakar, there was the formal approval of the first bylaws and formal election of the board. Viv and I were both on that board.

I think that's pretty much all I wanted to say in this round, recording my memories of the community coming together. I see a question in the chat that I'm not from African origin. I don't know where that idea came from. I'm certainly of African origin. I was born in South Africa. My parents and my grandparents were all born in South Africa.

Okay, let me stop there. Thanks.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Alan, for sharing the history of AFRINIC, and thank you for agreeing to write the proposal when you were requested. We're here because you said yes. Thank you so much for sharing that.

Fiona has joined us now, and I'm going to invite Fiona, who is the CEO of TESPOK, maybe you can introduce yourself as well as answer the question that I'm going to ask. Fiona, you and TESPOK have been involved in the AFRINIC community, and maybe you could share instances where you have collaborated with AFRINIC on different initiatives, and how have they impacted the Kenyan technology space?

Fionga Asonga: Thank you.

My name's Fionga Asonga. I'm current CEO of the Technology Service Providers Association of Kenya, [inaudible] to address interests of, initially, telecommunication service providers, ISPs, and MNOs, and I'll start by saying that the founder of TESPOK was in the team that Alan Barrett just mentioned, and a few others, tried to get AFRINIC together...

Sarah Kiden: Fiona, we're having a bit of trouble. Let me move on to Aisha as we sort out the challenge.

Aisha, I think I'm going to ask you the question next, and I'm going to combine it with a question that came on the chat from Siabonga Peter, who is sort of new in the community, and he's asking about how he can participate in terms of contribution to the development of AFRINIC, so since you've been a fellow, I think you mentioned that you were a fellow in 2018, could you share a bit of your initial motivations, your expectations, and how the fellowship program has helped you build your professional development? And maybe you can also use that to respond to Siabonga about how he can also contribute to AFRINIC.

Aisha Hamid: Thank you, Sarah.

Good morning again. I am Aisha Saho from The Gambia, the smiling coast of Africa. So, as an AFRINIC fellow? First of all, I think I need to give a brief background of how I stumbled upon AFRINIC, miraculously, I always say. What happened was, I did computer science at the university, and you know when you are a computer science student, it's more programming, mathematics, you are just confined within your study rooms, you are too nerdy, and I really felt like the knowledge that I'm acquiring was not... like, it's just being stored in my mind, I needed to share it. There was one of our lecturers, a physics lecturer, the late Lajo, introduced me to ISOC, and there was this Internet Society Gambian Chapter Group, which I joined. That was in 2012, and, interestingly, I served as Secretary General for the chapter.

During the course of working with ISOC, I was privy to go for a leadership training in Dakar, and that's where I actually learnt about AFRINIC for the first time.

Also, I didn't really just stop at ISOC, I also was coordinating the Girls in ICT campaign, and subsequently, in 2017, we formed an association, GamChix. GamChix was basically, and is still, an association of female engineers, females from the STEM fields, that come together to actually motivate young girls and women to consider careers in the STEM field, basically to bridge the gender gap in the world of technology.

So, with GamChix, that's where we got the training from AFNOG, and I came to learn about the Af*, and I developed a keen interest in AFRINIC. My motivation was I really wanted to join this dynamic network of innovative thinkers that are shaping the development of Internet in Africa, and I really wanted to contribute to that, because I felt like my contribution towards the Internet ecosystem was more local. I really wanted

to have a bigger platform to express my contribution, and add value in the little possible ways that I could.

So, AFRINIC fellowship came through the GamChix mailing list, that's how I applied, scrutinized, screened -- you will be scrutinized and screened, trust me -- and I was able to get the fellowship.

The fellowship, honestly, for me, it has really helped me in so many ways. I think the one part that I really hold to my heart is the policy development process. As Mr. Seun was saying, it's very interesting when there's an open mic session, and you come in and you say everything, just like you said, all of us, I've been through that as well. I went through the videos, and I'm like, ah, I know, I can't believe I said that. You get?

And also, the person that is receiving, trying to respond to all these feedbacks that are coming from the community, is equally sitting on a hot seat. So, there is that tense environment, but very educative. The debates are very educative. You have so much exposure, you learn so much through this whole sessions.

What it did for me and how it has actually added value in my professional career, is the public speaking part. One thing that I've always noticed is that, for female leaders, compared to the male counterpart, we kind of tend to keep our ideas to ourselves, and Mr. Viv said it, that, at the beginning, you have Africans who are not very vocal. I think it was partially due to our culture, because, culturally, you're not supposed to talk to your elders or something, but trust me, the policy development process actually just helps me refine my public speaking skills, and now, as a female leader, I am so vocal.

I go to webinars. I'm in this platform, but then also where you have so many people, because locally, I'm also involved in the policy development at the national level, where I'm the local person for the transport policy for the aviation sector, so you are in an environment filled with people with different opinions, and some people are really very, very vocal and very assertive, so you equally have to believe in yourself. You have to be able to express yourself respectfully.

Another thing that it has really helped me was the ability to be very tolerant. I think when you experience those sessions, for instance, the policy development session, you will develop that tolerance level. You just have to work on it. Because, you are interacting with people from diverse backgrounds, different experiences, everyone have their own opinion, and you have to find a way to actually just lay down and listen and absorb.

So, it was quite an educative moment for me, but then it has equally helped me develop my tolerance skills, my public speaking skills, and, of course, many, many other skills as well.

So, for the person that is looking forward to joining, first of all, you have to be able to add to the Internet ecosystem in your country, because you don't just think global without thinking local. You start local. This is one thing that I want all of the prospective fellows to actually start doing, be involved locally in your own ways, whether you're going to provide training, whether you're going to join local Internet communities, do so at your local level, and then eventually you can use that skill, and apply.

It's very easy to apply for the AFRINIC fellowship. We can talk about that more, because there are also mentorship, there is a mentor and screening committee, where we actually screen and mentor fellows, but basically just start local.

Start local, add value to your community in your own possible way, whether it's through blogging, whether it's through email, joining communities, webinars, seminars, whatever you can, just do something locally.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Aisha, for sharing your story. It's a sign of growth when you look back at some of the things. Same, when I look at some of the emails, I'm like, oh, you get that cringe feeling, but I think it's a sign of growth, because it shows that you've learned something, and you're now at a much better place.

Before we proceed, I wanted to invite Alan, because I noticed that there are a few new people on the chat, and we actually didn't say what AFRINIC does, so there's a question again from Peter about the role of AFRINIC on the African continent, so Alan, maybe you could take a minute or two to just talk about what AFRINIC does in the African continent.

Alan Barrett: Sure. Thanks, Sarah. This is Alan again.

The fundamental reason for having a regional Internet registry, like AFRINIC, is to distribute Internet number resources, which are mostly IP addresses, but also AS numbers, to our members, which are mostly Internet service providers. For any kind of device, like a mobile phone or a computer or anything to connect to the Internet, you need an IP address. Those IP addresses have to be unique. There has to be a management system for ensuring that they're unique, and registering which IP address is associated with which service provider. AFRINIC does that for the continent of Africa, and there are five regional Internet registries around the world that each do pretty much the same thing for their different continental regions.

That's why AFRINIC exists, but AFRINIC's role is much bigger than that, it's also to support Internet development in Africa, to support the AFRINIC membership in the community, and to have seminars and educational events like this, to hold meetings.

It all really starts from the need to keep a database of IP addresses to make sure that they're unique.

Thanks.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Alan. So, to the newcomers, I hope that has been helpful to understand the role of AFRINIC.

I have a question for Viv and Seun, you've both been on the AFRINIC board. I think by now we know that AFRINIC interacts with various stakeholders, as a former board member, how crucial is that engagement? I think we already started talking about it, about how it has evolved, and how we previously didn't even have people queuing up, how have you seen it change over the years, and where do you see us going ?

Sarah Kiden: I'll start with Viv, and then Seun.

Dr. Viv Padayatchy: Thank you, Sarah.

I think it's important for our community to engage, and show interest in the affairs of AFRINIC. The organisation stays strong as long as there's strong community support. I know that in the last few years it's been a challenge, and I think this is perhaps even more reason for the community to stay connected, to stay interested, to participate on the mailing list, and on debates on important questions about the future of AFRINIC. At the moment we cannot organize elections, but once we get the authorization from the court, the Mauritian court, to be able to organize an election, hopefully there will be candidates coming forward from different parts of the community for the positions on the board, people from the community applying for the jobs in the management and on the technical side of AFRINIC.

This is how, I think, members can contribute and support the organisation and advance its goals as its primary mandate, of course, is the Internet development in Africa.

If we look at the history of Internet development since the inception of AFRINIC, I would say that AFRINIC has played a pivotal role, in terms of not only managing the IP address space for AFRINIC for Africa, but it has conducted countless training sessions. AFRINIC has been critical in the adoption of IPv6 on the continent, in providing the support and the training necessary.

The policy development process that we use is relatively new in Africa, and, if we think about it, the creation of AFRINIC itself is a triumph for Africa, because it's a bottom up organisation, it's an organisation that is actually defined by its members from grassroots level. On the continent, as big as it is, and with 54 countries on that continent, we've been able to find consensus between North Africans, South Africans, East Africans, West Africans, Central Africans, English speaking people, French speaking people, and Portuguese, and what not, and we've all come together and agreed on the concept of AFRINIC and creating that organisation called AFRINIC.

There are a lot of challenges that the organisation is facing today from outside, but, for me, I would break it down into two main categories of challenges. The first one is the legal challenges that that arose as a result of its contractual obligations with its members, and we should not be surprised, or we should not be put off by that, because, in the life of any organisation, when you have a membership and you are bound by contract with those members, it is possible from time to time that there are disagreements between AFRINIC and its members, and, according to the rule of law, if somebody feels that his interest has been trespassed, or been affected, he or she has the right to go to court and challenge AFRINIC. So, it is not unique to AFRINIC, those kind of contractual challenges in court, it's common to all the RIRs, and it will continue as long as the organisation exists.

The other issue that AFRINIC has been facing is a governance issue. The governance issue, the one that we are facing now, is we do not have a functioning board, and because we do not have a functioning board, a number of decisions, including calling an AGM to be able to hold elections, cannot happen. That is, in my opinion, a bigger issue, and hopefully is an issue that can be resolved as soon as possible, so that the the organisation can get back to normal and participate in the NRO, in the community, in the whole RIR ecosystem, as a full fledged registry. The danger, of course, is, if we are not present in those important forums, then decisions get taken without our consent, without our participation, and we get basically ignored. That is the danger that we are facing at the moment, because we are not able to participate fully as an RIR in all those important forums, and therefore our voice is not being heard.

The community, our members, they themselves are important organisations, they are operators in their own right. If the organisation cannot be represented as AFRINIC, but you, as a member, find yourself in those forums, do speak for us, do speak for AFRINIC, so that we make sure that we are still, even though AFRINIC itself does not have a functioning board, but you as members, you get heard, you can defend the interests of the organisation, and make sure that others do not use the situation that we are in, to tread on Africa, and to take decisions at the expense of the continent.

This is what I wanted to say regarding membership engagements. Very important. The organisation is as strong as its members are willing to engage support.

Thank you, Sarah.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Viv.

Seun, do you have something to add onto that question?

Seun Ojedeji: Thank you for for asking that, because Viv has said a lot. I'll just emphasize on a few things. AFRINIC as a board, when I was a board member, during all AFRINIC meetings, we used to hold engagement sessions with the members, and, of course, with the community at large, which we called the open mic, kind of apart from

the normal members meeting. The members meeting also has a venue for non_members to sit in the room, as well.

The current situation we have at hand is that, in the last few years, we've not even been able to hold those meetings. AFRINIC meetings has not been able to be held. As Viv has said, it is very important that we have our members of the community engage in AFRINIC matters, be interested in it.

The last time, if I recall, the total number of members of AFRINIC is over 1,002. I don't know what the number is now, but at least we have way more than 1,000 members. But, when it comes to those that actually participate, it's maybe less than 100 in terms of voting, those who actually participate. The peak we've recorded in history, probably 200, and we have members in 1000. These are actually resource members. Community members don't have any restriction to participate. We usually have the usual suspects. Myself and some other community members are the ones that are always participating.

We need people, especially members, to be interested in the affairs of AFRINIC. If we have more voices, more members actually being interested in AFRINIC, then, as Viv has said, when the time comes for election, when the time comes for getting AFRINIC back to shape, we'll have members who will be available to ensure that they're putting the right people on the board, to ensure that they exercise their rights, because AFRINIC is a treasure to Africa, and we should not just let it slide.

I think it's three years that we've had meetings. AFRINIC normally holds at least two meetings a year, that is an avenue that we normally use to engage the community. Thanks to staff that they have actually come up with these remote-based webinar sessions to keep the community engaged, otherwise it will have been very difficult to engage our communities and our members.

We, members, community, of AFRINIC, we need to up our game, we need to sit up and, of course, see AFRINIC as our home, and not as their own.

Thank you.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Seun. You have people in the chat promising that they are going to become active, so let's see how things go.

The next question is to Amreesh. You had started talking about your journey within AFRINIC, and how you like your work, and how you grew. I'm interested in hearing about collaborations that you did with other people that are outside the AFRINIC community, and what kind of impact that had.

Dr. Amreesh Phokeer: Thank you, Sarah.

Yes, indeed, AFRINIC was a very fertile ground for collaboration. We might be working on the Internet in Africa, but the Internet is a global ecosystem and we have to interact with all the global stakeholders and all the global partners participating in building the Internet.

I would say the most natural group of people we were collaborating with were our collaborators in the other RIRs. We actually spent quite a lot of time together on making sure our systems are interoperable. AFRINIC was participating in, and I'm sure it's still participating in, the NRO ECG, which is the Engineering Coordination Group, where you have the CTOs of all the RIRs meeting to discuss matters related to how data is shared between the different RIRs, how to coordinate important applications such as DNSSEC or RPKI.

These were places where we collaborated with other people, but we also collaborated a lot with other organisations in Africa itself, for example with universities, to do research on specific topics about the health of the Internet in Africa. We also collaborated a lot with IXPs, help them, to some extent, setting up the infrastructure.

I remember we did quite a lot of work with Af-IX, the African Internet Exchange Point Association. We are also very active when it comes to the peering forums, such as AfPIF, in the region. We used to participate quite a lot, not only by providing training, but also by providing different type of support, presenting all the latest changes, or the latest that's happening, in the space of Internet protocol and Internet development.

So, yes many, many collaborations, and it is these collaborations that fuel the Internet ecosystem, I would say. We cannot only depend on ourselves. We need to have interactions with others, to understand the best practices that are happening out there, and try to bring them on the continent, but also come with our own suggestions.

Unfortunately, we have been a little bit timid with regards to participation in forums such as the IETF, where the development of protocols are discussed. Africa has a lot of potential to participate in these forums, and we should gather even more interest from the community to participate at higher levels, and at international levels, and, as Viv said, make our voice heard in those forums.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Amreesh.

I have a similar question to Alan. Do you have anything else to add in terms of collaboration between AFRINIC and other partners that Amreesh has not talked about?

Alan Barrett: Let me try. Amreesh talked a lot about research collaboration, and collaboration within Africa. I think there's also scope for collaboration outside Africa, working with the other four RIRs around the world, participating in the Internet

Governance Forums. There are international meetings organized by groups like the UN or the ITU where AFRINIC could possibly participate.

Of course, there's ICANN, iCANN is mostly known for dealing with domain names, but Internet numbers are also part of it. I'm sitting at an ICANN meeting right now, in Puerto Rico, where we had a very good session yesterday with a discussion between the ICANN board and the CEOs of the RIRs, and also the ASO address council.

I'd like to touch on the governance crisis facing AFRINIC, if that's okay. There's not very much information publicly available on exactly what's going on. I think most people are aware that there's a problem, but maybe not aware of the details. AFRINIC has faced a lot of lawsuits, one of the lawsuits prevented AFRINIC from holding board elections, so now the AFRINIC is sitting with too few board members to hold a quorum, so they cannot have a meeting, they cannot pass board resolutions, and that really interferes with the proper organisation of the organisation, the proper functioning of AFRINIC as a company.

I've been very impressed by the way the AFRINIC staff have been able to deal with this situation. We see, to a large extent, the staff are able to carry on business as usual, this webinar itself is an example of that. Despite not having a CEO, despite not having a board, the people who do the work on the ground at AFRINIC are still getting the work done, they're still organizing webinars, they're still allocating IP addresses, they're still doing training, they're still doing outreach to members, and that's fantastic.

It does not go unnoticed. People around the world can see how strong AFRINIC staff is, and eventually, sooner rather than later, we hope that we can find a solution to the governance crisis. I am hoping that an output from the court process is going to be that elections can be held, and I would call on the AFRINIC members and the AFRINIC community to put forward good candidates when elections are held.

We don't know when it will be, but at some point there's going to be elections to build the AFRINIC board, and it's critical that good people put their names forward.

Thanks.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Alan, for responding, and also thank you for joining us because I know it's not a convenient time since you are in Puerto Rico.

Fiona, there has been a lot of discussion about participation and contribution to the AFRINIC community, and TESPOK has actually been very active in the community. What kind of advice do you have for organisations that would like to contribute to AFRINIC?

Fionga Asonga: Sorry for the intermittent communication I had earlier.

Now, I think what I would say is, at this point in time, it's hard to get anybody to come in and partner with AFRINIC, when there are no clear structures, and that's the truth. We need to get our act together. We need to get our governance structures in order. Because, without those, who is signing contracts for collaboration and engagement? Who are we partnering with? Who's going to take liability in the event of issues in the contracts? It becomes very difficult for us to then firm up on that and move forward as far as that is concerned.

TESPOK has been involved in AFRINIC from the start, with Richard Bell, the founder of TESPOK, being a key participant in the initial board. Thereafter, when I joined TESPOK in 2006, I began to engage with AFRINIC in 2008, and, even then, it's because my membership are resource members of AFRINIC, and so I come in to represent the resource members.

I'm not the only association participating in AFRINIC, there is also the ISP Association of South Africa that has been very active at AFRINIC, and there are a number of other similar associations that come in.

[gap in audio]

...but they need to, once we have clear structures. In the absence of clear structures, a clear framework for engagement, It really is difficult to encourage an entity to come in to collaborate, because what happens to issues of responsibility and liability?

Thank you.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Fiona.

Alan, I'm going to bring you back briefly, then we will proceed to the next segment. I think it's a follow up question. Amadou is asking on the chat about the lessons we can learn from the current crisis. I don't know if we should call it crisis. What lessons can we learn and what measures can we put in place to ensure that something does not happen in future? And maybe Fiona can respond to this as well.

So, Alan, and then Fiona.

Alan Barrett: Thank you. That that's a very good question. What lessons can we learn? How can we make sure it doesn't happen in the future? My advice would be that the bylaws need to be reviewed from an adversarial perspective. So, when a new board is in place, somebody should look through the bylaws from the point of view of an attacker.

How could this part of the bylaws be used against AFRINIC? So, for example looking at the board quorum, if the bylaw says the quorum is a certain number of board members, then that needs to be reviewed with the idea of what if there's not, what if

they can't travel to a meeting. What if there haven't been an election? What if there's too few board members? There needs to be some kind of backup or contingency, an alternative, in many parts of the bylaws.

In normal times, maybe it's good to have a quorum of maybe five board members. But I think there needs to be a way out that, if you can't get those five board members, to still be able to hold a meeting with fewer.

It's not just the quorum there, there must be many other parts of the bylaws, and the way that the organisation is governed, where there can be changes to the rules.

I know some of the other RIRs have reviewed their bylaws, because they see the problem facing AFRINIC, and they don't want the same thing to face themselves. Just in the past six months, I know APNIC has passed several changes to their bylaws around the way elections are conducted.

Alan Barrett: I can't give specific recommendations of exactly how it should be done, but my general recommendation is that a new AFRINIC board would have to carefully review the bylaws with a view to protecting the organisation against similar problems in the future.

Thanks.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Alan, and I'm tempted to actually ask Viv and Seun the same question because you've been on the board before.

So, yeah, maybe Fiona can respond, then Viv, and then Seun.

Fionga Asonga: I think we can only discuss the preventive measures once we have come together and agreed on a way forward. We seem to be, as a region, not coming together on a way forward. We are having clusters of discussions about resources in AFRINIC, and we are having certain individuals feeling that they have the final say on what needs to be decided.

I think, at one point, we are going to be forced to focus only on resource members, people who have money at stake, who have put in funds to own the resources, and their businesses tend to lose if AFRINIC doesn't get its act together.

Why? Because a lot of the input is coming in, and I've nothing against the associate members or community members, but the associate members, entities that have come in as members but do not own resources, have not been very helpful in helping us address the problem. In some cases, they've been part of the problem, because they forget to look at it from the eyes of an entity, an investor, say, who has put money on the table, who's running a large network, say, for example, MTN, who have a very large

network and a lot of resources and a lot of customers in the region that they need to have.

My take is we need to find an opportunity where we come in and discuss this thoroughly, and it has to be driven by members who have something at stake, initially. Not that we shall leave the others out, but because those are the members who would have also the muscle, if there is something that needs to be done in a court situation, they'll be able to afford.

We've had a lot of back and forth and discussions on issues, but nobody wanting to take on responsibility and liability for actions that they take. These are the members who would put their money where their mouth is. Having the resource owners first come together, clean up, put everything that needs in place in place, then invite everybody else, and have the multistakeholder engagement that we had in the past.

That, for me, would be a way forward that helps us move from where we are at. In the absence, there's just been a lot of ideas, a lot of rushing of each other, a lot of fighting, yet we know that the problem was created by our own resource member, and that resource member needs to be dealt with by their peers, by other resource members.

Thank you.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you. I don't know if Viv and Seun have something else to add to that, then we can try to start to wind up the call.

Dr. Viv Padayatchy: I'm 100 percent aligned with Fiona in terms of members coming forward to help AFRINIC to get out of the current situation.

How do we do it? What would be the way for members to help? Because I think a lot of people and a lot of members individually want to help. Everybody seems to agree that we need to do something, perhaps it's not very clear what to do. So, at this stage, maybe if I can offer one option, concrete option, but that can certainly help AFRINIC, would be members, especially influential members like MTN, Liquid Telecom, those are are large influential members of, of AFRINIC, they can come here to Mauritius and seize the court, as parties who have locus, in the sense that they have an RSA with AFRINIC, they have a resource service agreement with AFRINIC, therefore they are an interested party, and, as an interested party, they can seize the court about what is happening, and express their, concern because, if something happens to APRINIC, they will stand to lose because their business will certainly be impacted, and that actually can push the court to listen and take actions, and at least we have some people from our community who will balance the adversaries that we've been facing outside our region, actually, the like of Cloud Innovation, those companies who've actually been entering injunctions and legal cases against AFRINIC. So, we need members from within our own region coming forward, using the same legal means, but in an opposing way to adversaries, in order to move forward in the right direction, maybe get the court to grant the authorization to

hold the election, to be able to reconstitute our board and get the company, get the organisation going. So, in terms of concretely, I think this is one thing that could be done now, and that will help AFRINIC.

Going forward, of course, once we get the authorization to hold an election, because the time will come, eventually if not now, but sometime in the future, AFRINIC will have to hold elections, we need to get good members. We need to get high caliber members, who are able to steer the organisation in the right direction. We need to fix our own governance problems. The bylaws that Alan was referring to is just one aspect of them.

Here in AFRINIC, we have always been facing the problem between the scope of the board intervention, and then the executive management. I myself have found that we need to spend some time to define that clearly. Even in the community, I get the impression sometimes, by going through all the discussions, that members of the community expect the board to manage the organisation, to manage the RIR, but it is not the board's duty to manage AFRINIC. The board only provides oversight. We have an executive management, headed by a CEO, who is supposed to do that. Too often, I find, in public meetings and on the mailing list, that the community expect the board to be doing that job. As a result, the board then think that it is their job to manage AFRINIC, and they kind of like interfere with the work of the management.

So, these are things that we need to fix, and we need to get right, because if we don't fix it, it will introduce vulnerability in our organisation, it will make us weaker, vulnerable, and then we'll find ourselves in situations that we've found ourselves in the past.

That's what I wanted to say and leave you with Thank you.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you.

Okay. I think we'll try to wind up. We are running out of time. So many questions and so much to talk about.

I would like to invite someone from AFRINIC staff, maybe Moussa, to talk about the training There has been a question about training.

So, do you still conduct trainings? How can people participate in the trainings?

Musa Stephen HONLUE: Thank you, Sarah. Thank you for inviting me on stage.

AFRINIC's next year of trainings? For a while now, we moved to online training in an aim to accommodate more learners, If you go on our e-learning platform, learn dot afrinic dot net, you will see that we have a lot of courses, 15 actually, 8 in English and 7 in French, which everyone can register for, and take at their pace. We also use this learning material to organize cohorts and instructor-led training, where we get

engineers to register, and we get our experts to help them, in 21 days, to get ready for our IPv6 certification program called Certi6. Everyone can go online and register.

We also organize onsite face to face events in countries, with the support of local groups. You all know the situation of AFRINIC right now, whereby we can't afford some expenses, so, if we have some local organisations in some of these countries, we can also organize what we call certification events, where we travel onsite, help the engineers to prepare for our IPv6 certification.

So yeah, we still offer trainings, but mainly online.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Stephen.

So, I'm going to invite the panelists to give maybe a minute or so of your parting shots. As you do that, maybe we should end on a good note. What has been your most memorable moment within AFRINIC? We're supposed to be celebrating 19 years. So, we will start with Aisha.

Aisha Hamid: Sarah, when I think of AFRINIC and my most memorable moment, I would say AFRINIC ANOVA. I remember that like it was yesterday. But, honestly for me, I think my parting message would be, when you go online, you see so much content, some of which are misleading on this NRS, and it's very saddening to see the situation that AFRINIC is currently facing, but then I believe that there is no problem without a solution.

To every problem, there is always a solution. For a community like AFRINIC, where everyone's voice matters, I think Mr. Viv made mention of the fact that collaboration ought to be there. In my local language, we say that a single broomstick cannot sweep a house, it requires too many sticks punched together to actually do the sweeping.

This is a community that belongs to us. This is a platform for every African, for African by African, and the same energy that we use, that I've seen at the African Internet Summit, where people come and talk and you, you see the passion in people, I would like to encourage everyone to use that same passion to actually channel towards achieving the solution for this problem.

I do believe there is a solution. There's no problem without solution. Like Madame Fiona mentioned, especially people that have resources at stake, they have a lot to lose, and I think it would be very unfair, for the next generation that are coming, to actually be presented with this. We can do better and we should do better, and we have to do better, because some of us learn so much from this platform, from AFRINIC, and this is ours.

For every business, continuity is key, and, for a business that actually runs on the contribution and support of the community, I think this is the time when AFRINIC needs the community the most. This is the time when we have to speak with one voice. This is the time when we have to put our differences aside, and also look at the legacy that we want to leave behind, because it's not just, I was in AFRINIC, and yada, yada, yada. But, then what legacy have you left for the next generation to actually reference?

That's what I would leave with the general community members, I think we have to work hand in hand, and when the problem is solved, we can punch one another in the face, that's Internet, that's after when everything is solved, but in the midst of all this, we have to do something, and we can do something, and for me, honestly, I'm available. I will do everything in my capacity. When I'm rich, I will definitely contribute, I'm very passionate about AFRINIC and the community, so I'm always available. Always.

And, I really think there is also a need for us to blow our trumpets, for us to sensitize people of the context of the problem, because I think that awareness is equally lacking.

That would be my parting message. Thank you.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you so much for your message.

Fiona?

Fionga Asonga: My parting message is that what we have shared today is part of the story that we are not going to be able to change. However, we have the opportunity to change the narrative of how it's going to go down. That is going to require some of us to take a back seat. If you're not a resource member, you may need to take a back seat, and let the resource members deal with the other resource members who are creating a problem for the entire community.

Sometimes, even in a family, when you're not there amongst the elder siblings, you learn to take a back seat, and let the elders, or the more senior people in the family, address an issue. That doesn't mean that you're not part of the family, you're still part of the community, but we have to be very pragmatic and very intentional on how we deal with it.

Again, sometimes we tell our much,

much

Fionga Asonga: elderly parents to hold. Why? Because this is being sorted by a different generation. We need to be able to be patient with each other, being cognizant that because the Cloud Innovation guys are resource members, being conscious that these

are fellow resource members, we've never given the chance to the resource members to deal with this issue.

Everyone has come in with all manner of solutions, yet, if the resource members sat down with them, this thing will be sorted, it will be thrashed. That will then be the beginning of a new legacy for the next generation. Aisha is saying she doesn't want the next generation to walk into this, but Aisha, we don't sort it out, you are actually going to walk into it by force.

Aisha Hamid: Very much so.

Fionga Asonga: For us to be able to start our way forward, we have to be so purposeful in how we approach it. Very intentional and very focused. When you get two business people to sit in a room to address an issue, you'll always get a result that will work and a middle ground. But, when you have someone who has the resources, and then someone else who doesn't, and they're trying to have an argument...

We've had a lot of arguments in the last three years. Some of us are tired of even reading those mailing lists. Why? Because we are not moving. We want to see results. We want to put together AFRINIC in a way that makes sense, even for posterity. It's not about individuals, Fiona or so and so and so and so.

No. It's really about, and that is why I'm going back and saying, the resource members. Resource members are, in a way, failing us, but they also still have an opportunity to come together and to chart the way forward. Why? Because they'll be talking and dealing with the Cloud Innovations as equals. When resource members decide, now you are messing it up, you're messing it up for us, that is why, in other regions, they've been able to correct their bylaws, and the resource members are pushing back. Have we given sufficient chance to resource members in our region? We need to. When we do that, then we are able to sort out our little quagmire, have those cases, a number of them, a significant number of them out, and have a meaningful discourse, in moving forward and getting AFRINIC to where it was supposed to be.

I hope that the year will not end when we are still struggling. Thank you.

Sarah Kiden: Let's hope so. Thank you, Fiona.

Alan, your most memorable moment, and your parting message?

Alan Barrett: Thank you, Sarah. This is Alan again.

I want to say that I agree with a lot of what Fiona said about the resource members. It's very important that the resource members be ready to provide candidates for board

seats when an election happens. I do hope that some of the court cases can be handled soon.

It's very hard to know the status of the court cases, because they're not published on the AFRINIC website. I think there may be something preventing the staff from being able to publish that. I don't know the details. I would very much like to see more information about the court cases, but it's not there.

I do have faith that, at some point, there will be elections, there will be a new board. In order for there to be a new board, the resource members, especially the large ones, will have to put up good candidates for election, that's critical.

I have so many good memories of AFRINIC, of the times where the community was able to come together and agree on something. I already mentioned the meeting in Cotonou, the meeting in Accra, the first board meeting in Dakar. There've been so many times when there've been policy discussions that go on for a long time, but eventually we can come to an agreement.

I have good memories of my time as CEO of AFRINIC, when the AFRINIC staff all made me feel welcome. I felt that they were all able to work together collaboratively. There was a good atmosphere. That's a good memory.

I want to say in parting that, to reiterate what I said earlier about the way that the AFRINIC staff are able to keep on working during this difficult time, it's not unnoticed. People around the world can see that, despite the problems with court cases, with no board, with no CEO, nevertheless people can see that the AFRINIC operations is still continuing very well, and that's fantastic.

Thank you so much to the staff.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you, Alan.

Amreesh?

Dr. Amreesh Phokeer: Thank you, Sarah.

I would also like to say that the work that the staff are doing, in this very complicated situation, is very commendable, and this shows how resilient members of staff is, and AFRINIC is, and I'm sure the community also eventually join hands and try to fix the problem as we move forward.

I believe, like the life cycle of any ecosystem, it comes in waves. There are the crest of the wave, and I think now we are in the trough of the wave. Eventually AFRINIC will build on what it has built before, and using that eventually find solutions to our problems.

In terms of the most memorable memory that I have, I would say the first ever AFRINIC meeting, or AIS meeting, that I went to, it was in Tanzania in 2011, where I discovered the whole ecosystem of AFRINIC, the different members, the trainings that were happening, and it was very eye-opening for me, and quite a memorable experience. I absolutely love that community.

I can't wait for everyone to be back together, and to continue working to advance Internet development in Africa.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you.

Seun Ojedeji?

Seun Ojedeji: Thank you.

I think I've said some of the things that were memorable enough earlier on, but for the sake of time, I have to say a few things.

Fiona, and some of the other panelists, have rightly said that the members are actually the ones that are lagging. We members, in terms of resource members, we are the one that are kind of lagging in our responsibility to keep AFRINIC afloat. There has been suggestions that members should get together.

Who is going to get them together? Who is going to take the responsibility? Who is going to take the lead in actually reaching out to these members? And, of course, finding a lasting solution to this issue. It's not enough to say members should get their acts together. Why? That's what should happen. Who is going to initiate this?

Let me say in quotes, the operational governance arm that is still existing in AFRINIC at the moment, to some extent, is the Council of Elders. There is practically no board, and of course the executive, which is led by the CEO, is not there at the moment, so I think that's a good thing Viv is on this call. If the the Council of Elders can also reach out to some resource members, let us find a lasting solution to this. Cloud Innovation needs to be brought on the table as well. Other key resource members need to be brought on the table. Let the resource members deal with this matter.

But, someone needs to initiate that discussion. Someone needs to call that meeting. It could happen in Mauritius, it could happen elsewhere, it could happen online, but there has to be a mutual agreement that we are here to resolve this issue once and for all, so that we don't even need to stay in court for this long. This thing needs to get out of court, the solution is not court. It's obvious, there has to be other ways of addressing this matter.

Otherwise, If you look at it, AFRINIC is actually an example to other RIRs. It is because of what happened in AFRINIC that has made some other RIRs to learn and start to understand, oh, we need to tighten this, we need to tighten that. What has happened at AFRINIC was not envisaged, nobody imagined that something like this could happen to a RIR, so there was no documentation, nothing that was written or planned to protect the organisation.

So, we really, really need to recognize that problems like this, that are not expected, also requires unexpected solutions, requires a different approach to solving the problem. We need to come to the table, bring all the parties involved on the table, and have them raise their concerns, let's see how we can address this issue, once and for all.

I'd like to also commend the staff for what they have been doing, they have been keeping the organisation afloat, but, again, it's not going to continue like this. We also need to recognize that staff are also human beings. Expectations are there, they have family needs, they want job security, they want confirmation of their job, they want to be able to show that they can project what is going to happen in future.

So, please, this is my message to at least the only structure we have at the moment, which is the sitting Council of Elders, please help us reach out to the members, especially the key ones, the large members category, probably, and let them come together.

Of course, if passport members can also be part of it, well and good, but the main thing is that we need to find a solution, and let's also bring the Cloud Innovation to the table as well. Let him talk to us as resource members. I'm a resource member myself. Let him talk to us. Let us talk to him. Let's all bring ourselves to our senses back, because I think that is the problem we're having now, we've been going, talking at different corners.

Sorry for taking too much time. I'll hand it back to the chair now.

Sarah Kiden: Okay.

Last but not least, Viv, your most memorable moments as well as your parting shots.

Dr. Viv Padayatchy: Thank you, Sarah.

There's been a lot of memorable moments. I won't dwell too much on that, because I would prefer to concentrate on the part, but just for the sake of completeness, I think the first meeting in Dakar, and my chairmanship of AFRINIC, meeting so many people, the staff and members of the community, and I've remained friends with a lot of them until now. So, it's the people that I've met.

Now, I want to, to come back to Seun's appeal regarding the AFRINIC situation. I can assure him that, as Council of Elders, we've been working with the legal team and trying to get things moving through the court. Unfortunately, we haven't been successful. We've even been attacked in the court, as we expected, because they see us as the last functioning sort of body that can speak for AFRINIC, but we will continue our work, and I think the suggestion of Seun to see whether we can get a resource member meeting? I like that.

I would certainly like to discuss that with the Council, to see in what way we can make that happen. If we can get the resource members to work with us, then at least we won't be alone.

In terms of my last wish for AFRINIC, I would like to see less people who find problems to solutions, and more people who focus on the solutions to the problem. I've seen so many hair splitters among us, dwelling on the superficial things, but, overlooking the fundamentals. I think we want people who genuinely wants to help, they want to go to the bottom of things, not trying to be the loudest or the most vociferous.

AFRINIC is resilient. AFRINIC is not broken, it's got working management. The staff, as Alan said, have done a wonderful job, and they are the heart of that resilience. The company is operating, it's financially sound, healthy. The only problem, and I want to repeat that, the only problem that AFRINIC has today is the problem of governance, it doesn't have a functioning board.

But, once we get that, forget about all the 50 court cases that we have in court, because these are contractual. These are matters between members who are challenging AFRINIC based on their resource service agreement, and that will just continue in court, and a lot of them actually will just fall away.

The main problem we have is a governance problem. We need to be able to to establish quorum on the board. So, we need to be able to get authorization from the court, in the absence of a current board, to call an AGM and organize an election.

I've seen a lot of people on the chat asking what is the problem that APRINIC is facing? It sounds very complex, because we have so many court cases. Forget about the contractual cases. These are not material. The only problem that we have is a governance problem. We don't have a current board to be able to call an AGM, and because we can't call an AGM, we can't call an election, and we can't reconstitute the board.

That is the only problem at hand that we need to fix, and if we all focus on that one problem, I don't see why we can't resolve that early in 2024. So that is my final message, Sarah.

Thank you.

Sarah Kiden: Thank you. Thank you so much, and thank you to all the panelists, and thank you to everyone for engaging.

At the start of the call, I said it's 19 years of AFRINIC, but I think through the webinar, we've learned that it's been more than 19 years, and I hope you've learned as much as I have learned, about how AFRINIC has changed over the years, and the wishes for the future.

The next webinar will be on 21st of March, 2024 at 9:00 UTC, and the title is 'Internet Development Initiatives in Africa'. We invite you to join this webinar.

Thank you so much to all the panelists. Thank you to AFRINIC staff for the support, and thank you to all the attendees for joining this webinar.

Thank you.